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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the content and teaching methods in a 4-year decentralized preschool teacher education program using a combination of direct and distance learning at Stavanger College in Norway. The content of preschool education and the knowledge skills, communication skills, and the general professional competencies required for professional qualification are delineated. Open interviews conducted with teachers with experience in distance teacher education from 4 colleges and with 24 students are then analyzed to evaluate the distance teaching methods used. Findings noted suggest that distance education is suitable for some areas of preschool teacher education, planning is extremely important in distance education to ensure a match between content and teaching method, making the structure of the course explicit is important for students, and teachers note the difficulty in knowing when to challenge students and when to support them during distance learning. Strengths and difficulties in using each of the following methods are discussed: computer communication, study-letters or booklets for each learning module, video and audiotapes, telephone conferences, individual phone calls, and direct teaching. Finally, the paper discusses the special challenges of student assessment in distance learning. (KB)

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MARTHA LEA:

THE PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION OF PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS IN DECENTRALISED TEACHER EDUCATION

ED 423 994

Pre-school teacher education has to secure professional qualifications for teachers in day care institutions. In Norway pre-school teacher education qualifies one to work with children from 0 - 7 years. There is a great need for pre-school teachers throughout the country. Like in other countries, the ones who want the education do not always have the opportunity to move to a college city. Therefore the Department of Teacher Education at Stavanger College has developed a decentralised model of pre-school teacher education, using different distance means of teaching. Pre-school teacher education is ordinarily a three year course, whilst the decentralised model takes four years. This gives students the chance to do some parallel work as assistants in kindergartens.

To be certain that this decentralised education has the same quality as the education on campus, I am conducting an evaluation of the use of different teaching approaches in different subjects, and the issue of addressing professional development.

THE CONTENT OF PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION

The subjects of pre-school teacher education in Norway are educational theory and practice, aesthetic subjects like drama, music and art and crafts, physical education, mathematics, science, religion and ethics, Norwegian language and social sciences. There are at least 20 weeks of practice in different day care institutions or schools, (6-7 weeks per year for three years).
The professional qualification consists of competence in different areas:

Knowledge skills

We expect the students to develop:

- knowledge of the subjects which form the content of teaching
- an understanding of the theoretical parts and capacity to perform the practical parts of the subjects
- didactic knowledge, i.e. knowledge of how to use the subject in the daily -programme in kindergarten/school.
- a commitment to utilise and develop different parts of the subjects

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Communication skills

Communication skills are needed in different areas:

- when meeting children and parents with social and cultural differences
- when using appropriate teaching strategies among a group of children
- when working together with colleagues and in contact with other relevant professions and community members.

General professional competences

- The more general competences consist of:
- capability to use the knowledge and the communication skills in the daily work of the school/kindergarten.
- capability and commitment to evaluating and improving the teaching programme.
- capability and commitment to evaluating and partaking in the improvement of the school /kindergarten as an organisation.
- responsibility in all aspect of work.

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ORGANISING THE STUDENTS IN DECENTRALISED TEACHER PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION OVER 4 YEARS

One way of organising a course is to divide the students into different groups for different purposes.

The whole group: 48 - 60 students (not more). 3-4 teaching blocks at campus per year
Divided in 4 regional groups of 12 - 15 students, 7-8 regional teleph.conferences with teachers per year
Each regional group divided into 4-5 study groups of 3-4 students. Weekly meetings.

Practice in school/kindergarten, 1-2 students per school 4 - 6 weeks per year (total 20 weeks).

The regional groups and the study groups use a local study room where necessary equipment is available.

TEACHING METHODS IN DECENTRALISED PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION.

A certain part of the study can be organised in blocks on campus. In the course in Stavanger 60% of the teaching was organised as direct teaching in 3-5 blocks each year. Then ordinary methods are used in different subjects, lectures, study groups.

Practice in school/kindergarten can be organised and counselled like practice in an ordinary course.

In the ODL (open and distance learning) part of the study the following communication and teaching means can be used:

- Videotapes, both pre-produced and self-produced as a mean of communication between the teacher and the student.
- Audio tapes, produced and self-produced.
- Telephone for individual contact and group conferences.
- Letters between students and teachers by
  - E-mail
  - Internet
  - «S-mail»
  - Fax

  These «letters» can be study letters produced by the teacher, reports from the students, exchange of study questions and guidance from the teacher.
- Multimedia-productions for the computer like CD rom (occasional use)
- Computer conferences (using some Internet programmes like FirstClass)
- Satellite lectures (expensive and seldom used)
- Satellite conferences (the same)

The communication and teaching means can be used in different ways by different teachers and in different subjects.

Some of these methods are also used in teaching on campus.

EVALUATING DISTANCE TEACHING METHODS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The main sources for answering the questions are, in this context, open interviews of teachers of experience with distance teacher education, and two groups of students (12 persons each). The teachers represent different subjects and come from these colleges, which all provide pre-school teacher education:
Northern College, Dundee/Aberdeen, Scotland
Fósturskóli Islands, Reykjavik, Iceland
Bergen College, Bergen, Norway
Stavanger College, Stavanger, Norway

In the three Nordic colleges, distance education is used as a part of the pre-service course. In Northern College it is primarily used in in-service courses. The similarities between experiences are greater than the differences.

Some of the teachers' experiences

We can put forth several questions about this way of organising teacher education, how the teaching means are used and how to achieve the professional qualification, the teachers' role and the impact on campus education. In this connection, I will try to summarise some experiences from two points of view, the use of different teaching approaches and the achievement of professional qualification.

1) [redacted]

2) [redacted]

These questions will be summarised and discussed separately.

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE USING DIFFERENT FLEXIBLE TEACHING MEANS IN DIFFERENT SUBJECTS?

Pre-school teacher education consists of different subjects, as mentioned earlier. Some of these subjects have mainly a written, theoretical tradition. In others, personal skills aremore important. The common aim for all subjects is to develop the student's knowledge, skills and attitudes in preparation for the professional qualification. The different available teaching means in distance education will perhaps be more or less suitable, or can be used in different ways.

MOMENTS IN THE PLANNING PERIOD

Coherence between goals, content and teaching methods
In accordance with the Norwegian Framework Plan, one of the principles of Pre-school teacher education and of each of the subjects in the study is the holistic principle. This means attaining coherence between the goals of the study and the subjects, the content, the practice, the evaluation and the organisation of the study.

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The teachers are rather conscious that this connection must be secured in the planning period. It is more difficult in distance education than in campus education. You have to plan the course as a whole, you have to evaluate which different parts of the subject can be presented directly, which can be presented through study letters or computer communication, which parts can be the students' responsibility to read and discuss, and how to communicate with the students. To be able to do this, it is important to know what different means can offer.

One of the teachers remarked .

> *«To choose the themes that you will present directly is very important. I saw the connection between the presentation in the study letters and the lectures. Some topics I presented for them to discuss in their own study groups, but I also gave them a possibility to respond to the lectures.»*

The balance between the teaching of theory and developing the students' practical understanding and skills.

Practice in the kindergarten is the same as in campus education. Therefore the experiences from that part of the education are not discussed in this connection.

The developing of the students' practical understanding refers to the skill that is a part of the knowledge, especially in the subjects of drama, music, art and crafts, physical education and science. When part of the education is theory and part is counselling and training skills, the question is when to do what. Most of the teachers consider a balance between theory and training as very important, and want to counsel during the training face-to-face, if they don't have two-way picture/sound connections. Therefore the sessions at college are used to working «on the floor». The students can read and discuss theory by themselves and in study groups, but the fundamentals of theoretical knowledge are important for developing skills, teachers say.

It was possible to place some experimental material in the local study rooms in science, art and crafts and music. So some of the practical sides of the study could be decentralised. One of the art and crafts teachers was satisfied with this distance organising, not only because of the training possibility it gave the students, but also because of the social effect on the students of working together in a practical way. One response from a science teacher shows what he has to take into account:

- *«It is very difficult through a letter making them see things.—You are not there when they observe the star-sky, so in their minds they can create the most odd pictures of stars.»*

To give the students an overview of the different parts of the study

When the students get a greater part of the responsibility for their own study, it is important that they also can see the whole structure of the study with blocks of direct teaching, written communication through letters or computer, oral communication through telephone, video tapes or audio tapes, individual work or group discussions.

The experience is that the clearer the structure is for both teachers and students, the more the students can concentrate on the main issues.

The distance

The distance means that the teachers don't see the students every day or every week. This poses a challenge. One teacher has expressed the situation like this:

> *«The most difficult thing was to know the students' context sufficiently, and to know them enough to know when I have to challenge them and when to support. It is important to be able to see their need for learning at any time. The more contact we had, the easier it was, your answer could be more adequate.»*

Teachers try to overcome this challenge by, for example, using different means of communication.

THE USE OF DIFFERENT TEACHING MEANS

Computer communication

The most self-evident condition for using computer communication is that both students and teachers have the right equipment available, that it works and that they have the competence to use it. If not, the medium will be a source of frustration instead of help.

There are different possibilities in conferencing systems. You can, for example, use home pages, news groups or a communication system called FirstClass. While the college in Iceland has used news groups, Northern College in Scotland used FirstClass. The main thing is that the system allows groups to present work, discuss subjects and ask questions. When you choose a system, it must give the opportunity to define who shall be able to join different groups, so that the participants know whom they are speaking to. The system helps to keep order and maintain coherence in discussion themes.

When students present their assignments, they share their knowledge with others, and give co-students the chance to offer comments.
The teacher or the student can set up a topic for discussion. Even if the system is well-known and the topic is interesting, some students are reluctant to participate. One teacher suggests that no more than three people should share a discussion group. Then the students feel secure. Another has found that discussion groups should not be on-line for a long time. Short-lived groups strengthen the discussion. In open discussion groups there are more readers than participants.

Written discussion makes it possible to reflect before presenting one's opinion. Insecure students like to think over what they are writing, both because one can't wipe out the written word in discussion groups, and because of the openness to others. Discussion groups develop reflective knowledge. Naturally one can also get superficial responses.

E-mail is used for rapid change of information or answers to questions. To make it work, there must be common agreement about what «rapid» means. One teacher says that she promises an answer within three days. Both E-mail and computer conferencing are means of counselling, but can also be used to inspire the student and keep the momentum going in their work wherever they sit.

One difficulty that teachers mention is how to evaluate students' participation in discussion groups when it is optional to join in. What about passive students?

The use of study letters

In the in-service courses in Scotland, there are pre-produced study-letters or booklets for every module, including a guide and assessment. These series of letters are, in fact, the course and are used by everyone teaching on the course. It saves time for the different teachers in preparing their teaching.

The function of a study letter in distance pre-service education, is not defined whether in Norway or Iceland. It is up to the teachers, and written by them. The important thing is that every teacher has to define the use of the study letter together with other means, in accordance with the holistic principle. Most of them say that the letters consist of information, themes from theory and questions for discussions, or ask for some kind of documentation from the students.
For example one teacher comments:

> *«I think the content tends to provide information, guidance, and clarification, giving instructions and seeking clarification from the students.»*

Writings about theory usually involve «clarification», inspiring and helping students to structure their reading, summarise themes, pointing to main issues, giving advice about literature or drawing attention to the didactic consequences of a particular theory. It can also widen the theoretical aspects if teachers give a kind of written lecture.

Assignments, smaller tasks or questions to discuss can either be a formal part of the study that requires documentation from the students, or they can be an aide to more reflection and deeper understanding of the profession.

Some teachers are conscious that every assignment or response needs immediate feed-back:

> *«If you don't give feed-back on it, then they are going to lack the motivation to go into it.»*

If you are going to clarify parts of theories, to help the students structure their work, it is necessary to be precise and to have an overview so that you can point to connections between subjects or between theory and practice, making theory relevant in relation to concrete kindergarten situations. This also means that some of the preparation for the teacher is to show the connection between lectures, literature and later discussion themes during telephone or video-conferences. Good lay-out of written documents also helps to clarify, inspire and make things concrete.

The students are very pleased to receive study letters.

An interesting question about the use of pre-produced study letters can be raised. In Bergen, one of the teachers has some experience with the difference between using pre-produced study-letters and self-produced ones. She says:

> *«The pre-produced letters that we get are really beautiful, thoroughly prepared, but they are dead compared to the function of our letters which give the actuality and development of the study. Students say, «we would prefer letters not so perfectly edited, but more adequate to our situation».»*

The difference between these pre-produced study letters and the study letters at Northern College is that you don't know the teacher or teachers who have produced them, and you can use them all over the country. In Northern College the study letters are written by a teacher at the institution and are used there.

This raises a question which might be relevant in connections with other pre-produced teaching material. Which effect has pre-produced material on the teacher's role? Is it possible to describe the balance between using pre-produced and self-produced material in order to keep actuality and «life» in the teaching?

The use of video and audio tapes.

The audio tape has been around from at least the fifties. It is strange that music and language dominate its use as a communication medium. In the interview, however, several teachers think that it might be convenient to tape lectures for the students to listen in the car going to and from work, for instance, but it is not tried. In music, it is used to train or guide in singing or playing, to listen to different sorts of music, or like its use in language, in documentation of children's language either musical or verbal.

All subjects in pre-school teacher education use video tapes in some ways.

If teachers are going to use pre-produced material, they need to know what is available, to have a look at it to see what is relevant, and to be confident that it fits into the study programme they have planned. The same process is important when they choose literature, but it seems more time-consuming for the teachers to evaluate videos.

In the college where there are technicians who can assist in the production of a video bit, some of the teachers have sent out examples of kindergarten situations to discuss, for instance.

It is, however, more usual to ask the students to present videotaped situations that can be discussed either in the students' groups or in sessions at college. This might include documentation of their work, exhibitions they have created, for instance, or role play. It has been used for formal documentation in art and crafts and in music. The possibility is there for other subjects as well.

Video is very useful to show teaching situations where the teacher's/student's didactic and pedagogical work can be discussed and evaluated. In this way, videos

have been used in most subjects of the kindergarten's teaching programme. Even if the students have another focus than that of the teacher, this can raise interesting discussions.

The video as an observation medium is excellent to show, for example, children's different play, to gather rhymes and to register children's physical development or activity. One of the teachers remarks:

«We think using video is an excellent medium of research.»

The important thing is to have permission from parents or from the day-care institution.

Students say that it is rather challenging to act in a video. They feel it is a one-way communication. *«You do something, and feel a little stupid afterwards because you miss the immediate response,»* is how one of them put it.

Nevertheless most of them are positive towards the use of videos. Another student says:

«We have fought us through it and found that we have become strengthened, so I think it has been very good for our self-development»

If the teachers get individual videos to comment, they find it rather time-consuming. One teacher asks the students to present their group work or tasks. He then thinks the medium is efficient, and is able to give adequate comments.

Teachers see that two-way picture-sound connections or video-conferencing give other possibilities. Then there is no time delay between performance and response or questions and answers. The counselling becomes more immediate and to the point.

Put in few words, teachers seldom produce videos to be used in teaching, only when technical assistance is available. It is easier to let students present different tasks or situations by using video records. Some teachers find videos time-consuming as individual communication means. Students find it stressing being «actors», but useful in self-evaluation. Two-way sound picture means seem more efficient in counselling.

The use of telephone conferences.
There are different models of telephone conferencing.

1) Teacher and students sitting in their different homes.They have to learn to know each other from the voices, but they miss the dynamism of the group. There is sometimes a halt in the discussion, and at other times everybody speaks at the same time. If study groups are not a part of the course, this model is used.

2) One teacher at the college and a group of students around a conference telephone. If the conference is planned as a part of the programme, it can give an openness both for the teacher and the students to decide which questions are

relevant. It seems that this way of communication is most appreciated both by the students and the teachers because it offers the chance to deepen understanding.

3) A group of teachers at the college around a conference telephone talking with a group of students in the same way as model 2. Our experience with this model is that teachers get to know more about each others' teaching. It forges teamwork, and they share experiences in the teaching situation afterwards, having the opportunity to discuss common topics. The discussions with the students, however, are more centred around practical questions, like, «When do we have to answer the questions in the study letter?» and «What timetable do we have in the next college session?». The students find the conference gives little time to ask questions that need longer explanations or discussions from one teacher when there are four teachers sitting at the other end.

Model 2 and 3 take the same time for each of the teachers if they have four groups for 30 minutes. In model 3, the different study groups get less time (30 minutes instead of 2 hours).

Some teachers and students feel a little awkward on the telephone. Shy students do not ask questions in a group, fearing they might show themselves up. Some teachers are also somewhat insecure about having to answer unexpected questions, to explain problems for which they are not prepared. Certain teachers prefer face to face encounters.

In overall terms, both groups express satisfaction with the possibility of telephone conferencing. One teacher even says that telephone counselling and discussion is better than face to face conversations, because one has to be more clear and concise without the body language, so as not to be misunderstood.

The telephone conference is a forum for discussion where both teachers and students are responsible for the content, or the decision can be that it is just for the students to ask questions. The main issues in using telephone conferences is that the responsibility for the content has to be decided in advance, and the aims and the expectations of the communication have to be clarified. A common sharing of the responsibility in planning the telephone conference (model 2) seems to give most satisfaction, both among teachers and students.

Individual calls to the teachers.

Most teachers are generous with students. They let students call any time, and they like this way of tutoring. They know that the student who calls really is interested, and it offers quick feed-back. They learn to know the individual student. Sometimes they fix an appointment. Students appreciate the possibility of calling, but are sometimes worried about «bothering» teachers. They do not want to misuse the openness.

The direct teaching sessions
Even if questions about direct teaching situations are well known, there are some special moments mentioned by the respondents, which have to be taken into account.

Room situation
One of the most challenging situations reported, is the room situation. When the sessions (3-4 days to 2 weeks) are not planned as a part of the time-table and room plan before the start of the term, there are problems later on. This comment come from the three colleges with the pre-service courses. In Northern College, the sessions take place in the summer. It looks like special projects do not have the same rights to adequate auditories and rooms for teaching as so-called ordinary studies.

Resources
These differ from place to place, and how many students a distance course counts. This is not a part of the research, but is mentioned so often by the teachers that it has to be considered. The group size means greater rooms in sessions, it influences ways of teaching, more time to counselling is needed, more equipment to the study rooms. All these factors are not always compensated for with resources.

Content
The content of the sessions is more or less decided in the planning period, and is commented on earlier (pp 3-4).

Organisation of the session period
The periods with direct teaching are more intense than teaching in campus courses, with around 8 lessons per day. In one college every teacher has the responsibility for the whole day. It is quite exhausting for the teacher, they say. The day period can be divided between teachers.
The reason why the direct teaching periods feels so intense might also be because the teachers want to put all the issues of the subject into the direct teaching.
The students do not complain. Because of their total situation with work and family besides the study, they need the time.

Ways of teaching
Apart from the room situation and the group size, the teachers have a dilemma when they plan how they want to teach. The balance between developing skills and presenting theories in aesthetic subjects is already mentioned. The students want as much lecturing as possible. The teachers' dilemma is then to find the balance between the students' wishes and their own knowledge about how to teach in exemplary ways, varying the teaching.

Summary
In the planning period, it is important to plan both practical and teaching aspects of the course. In the same way that it is necessary with available technical means to use them, it is necessary to have adequate rooms for teaching on campus. The holistic principle of education makes it necessary to plan the whole course at once. It

is necessary to create coherence between goals, content, teaching methods and evaluation. To do this, it is important to be conscious about the whole subject and its place in the education, and to know the possibilities of the different teaching means.

In that connection it is necessary for aesthetic and practical subjects to find the balance between the teaching of theory and developing the students' practical understanding and skills.

In the preparation and starting period, it is necessary to give students an overview of different parts of the study, the use of the different means and the claims and expectations to their part of responsibility for the study.

The computer can be used to every form of written communication. It is a rapid communication means. The new possibility that the computer represents, besides giving information and sending letters, is to open conferences for defined groups to discuss assignments, theoretical questions or themes . «Defined groups» can also mean teacher/student communication. The function of and rules around the different conferences have to be defined, claims which are put forth to the students' participation.

A study letter can be sent by computer, but it is a teacher's document compared to a computer conference. It can be defined as a document that gives information, guidance, clarification of theories, instruction and seeking clarification from the students etc. There is a difference between a pre-produced study letter used by different teachers and a study letter self-produced by the teacher. One can be discuss the difference in teaching when using these two kinds of letter.

The video-tape represents another «language». It is found to be excellent in documentation of students' work, demonstration of teaching situations to discuss in different groups with or without the teacher, and as a research medium in observation of children. As some teachers think it is time consuming to look at demonstrations and give comments, the question is to what extent is it useful in the distance study, use of time taken into account.

In telephone conferences the participants are available at the same time. You hear the voices of the participants. Responses come immediately and the duration is limited to minutes or hours. These moments represent differences compared with a computer conference. The resemblance is that the responsibility for the content has to be decided, the frames of the conferences have to be defined, and the aims and the expectations of the communication have to be clarified both to students and teachers.
Two-way sound/picture communication gives further possibilities of counselling students' practical performances.

One of the dilemmas in the sessions at college is how to give exemplary teaching in the different subjects when the students first and foremost want one-way lecturing. It is important to organise a long day of teaching with variations, because of keeping both students and teachers fresh and because of the need for skills training in different subjects .

IS THE PROFESSIONAL ASPECT OF THE PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION SECURED IN DECENTRALISED CONTEXTS?

In a decentralised pre-school teacher education context where different distance teaching methods are used, the question of how the professional matters are taken care of in the different subjects and through the design of the study is crucial. So too is the balance between traditional and more flexible ways of teaching.

In the Norwegian Framework Plan for the Pre-school Teacher Education, it is made clear that the student teacher's fitness for the profession has to be evaluated. It is an holistic evaluation, said to include pedagogical and personal capabilities, as well as knowledge, skills and attitudes (pp.21-22). In another part of the plan (p. 14) the personal abilities important for the profession are described in this way:

> *«The pre-school teacher study is the door to a profession with an impact on self-dependence, collective responsibility, co-operation and ability to engage in critical reflection» (p.14)*

Generally speaking, the aim of the whole course is to develop professionalism. Professionalism includes knowledge in the different subjects broadly defined, communication and co-operation competence, responsibility to others and to the work, and reflective and practical competences revealed in daily activities.

Practice with children is part of the evaluation, but is not included here because it is taken care of in the same way as in ordinarily organised pre-school teacher education.

The questions to the teachers started with knowledge like this:

> *«Do you think you can take care of the aim of your subject and develop the students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in distance learning?»*

To get deeper into the question of professionalism, the following three aspects were introduced into the interviews: developing responsibility, problem-solving/reflection skills and communication abilities. The questions were like this:

> *«Does the study model provide possibilities to develop students' responsibilities?»*
> *«Does the study give room for reflection and problem-solving?»*
> *«Is it possible to strengthen students' communication skills?»*

With a Yes to these questions, I would expect a Yes also to the last question:

> *«Are you able to evaluate the students' professionalism and their fitness for the profession in the same way that you do with campus students?»*

Knowledge

As to the knowledge question, it was easy to answer. Students have to present different documentation in different ways during the four years. The same can be said about the skills, but I have already indicated how carefully teachers have to plan their teaching, using the different means to develop students' skills, especially in subjects like drama, music, arts and crafts, physical education and science.

As to the attitude aspect, the answers varied a bit more, but the discussions in the conferences, the collective work in the study groups and the students' situation with

parallel work in the kindergartens were moments that contributed to the development of professional attitudes. One reply was:

> *«---So the distance learning because they are operating in their own practice in the same time, I think has a bigger impact on the whole attitude to continuing professional development and the development skills,---»*

With some nuances, the answers to the question were positive. After the teachers' experiences, they could take care of the aim of the subject and develop the students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in distance learning.

Responsibility

Distance education places demands on students to be responsible for their own study, whether the distance part is a big or a small part of the study. The situation the students have in the decentralised pre-school teacher education or in in-service courses is usually the same. They have family responsibilities, work responsibilities and study responsibilities. To manage this situation they need precise planning and good follow-up.

Distance students are motivated. They get the chance of an education they would not be able to follow elsewhere, because of geographical and family situations. Such circumstances can strengthen motivation, but open education can also foster motivation. We don't know what is most important.

In studies where the students have to follow local study groups, they don't only have individual responsibility, but also a responsibility to the group.

These are the moments that teachers reflect upon when they say that the distance students show more responsibility in this study than students in campus courses. The distance students are, on the other hand, quite conscious that they are responsible for their learning. The students say that in study groups they give both personal support and study help if someone falls behind.

Problem-solving and reflectioning

It is a simplification to use problem-solving and reflection as almost synonymous concepts. Reflection can describe the analytical process both before a solution of a problem is chosen, and in the analysis of the result. Both concepts belong to the same process. The opposite is to give a standard answer to different challenges, which means no reflection.

Three aspects seem to be important in the connection of developing reflection:

- that the students have practical experience from kindergarten work, either before the study starts, during the study or both.
- that the tasks the students get are based on reflection.
- that the students have a study group to discuss the problem-formulation with.

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Theory/practice aspect

Most of the students have practice from kindergarten beforehand. With three of the colleges, it is expected that they work in kindergarten during the study, and in the fourth quite many have. Both teachers and students say that it is easier to reflect on different questions relevant to their future work when students have this experience. A teacher says:

> *«I think there is no problem with reflection, and I think reflection is stronger in some ways in the distance learning, because they are in their own place, and almost all assessment tasks demand a level of reflection in practice, so that our model of distance learning is much more geared towards reflection than probably the full time course.»*

The use of different assignments

The tasks given to the students are different. One teacher says that every lecture ends with a reflection assignment to send the students in the study letter. Different assignments might be observations with reasoning around interpretations, questions from theory or evaluations of their own work.

«They must have an analytical attitude to their own work with children,» one of them says.

A characteristic response to the question if the problem-solving and reflection have a place in the distance education, is as follows:

> *«Yes, to a great extent. The form of the study with study letters between the intensive sessions, the inspiration to work with questions they meet in their reading and put forth to us, the reflection. This subject without reflection would be a non-subject. Reflection is one of the fundamentals.»*

The use of study groups

In two of the institutions, it is expected that students in the distance study communicate in study groups as well as with teachers. In the other two institutions, it is voluntary to work in study groups.

Both in this question about reflection and problem-solving and in the question about developing communication skills, the use of study groups is mentioned by the teachers. They say that the group discussions are crucial and strengthen the ability to reflect. This answer is an example:

> *«Moreover, what made reflection possible and made it function, are the study groups. I think it is genial, and the students said so afterwards , if they hadn't had the groups, the study would not have worked so well.»*

More than in ordinary study, distance students get involved in a great variety of tasks. They have to find answers both in theoretical problems and in practical situations, individually and in groups, and they do it without the teacher near by. The tasks can be open for the students to find their own answers. The assignments can also claim a discussion from a certain angle or expect the students to give theoretical reasons for practical plans or performances.

Communication ability

One of the goals of language teaching and of the aesthetic activities and also in pedagogy, is to communicate. This it is generally catered for in the study programme.

Some teachers are not convinced that distance students learn to communicate better than campus students. They say they don't know what is going on in the study groups. Some also say that group work could be used more, to help students to handle conflicts in a professional way. This view is shared by some of the students. Others say that they haven't used several communication means.

Students with experience from using study groups say:

«When we work in groups we see how different we are.»
«We do not work alone in kindergarten or school either. There is a theme and we have a group there as well.»
«Collaboration has been socially and professionally useful.»

The main impression in the teacher group is positive. The distance students have to communicate more and through more different means than students at campus. The variation in expressing themselves and getting responses might prepare for a profession in which all ways of communication are relevant. The written form needs more precision than the oral because body language is excluded. Teachers say:

«They get trained in ways of communicating that are used in the kindergarten, or rather similar, to receive messages and initiate them, give messages and take responsibility. There are different types of communication used in this study. It is not so varied in the ordinary study.»

«It is easier for students to express themselves. It is easier for the teacher to organise the study in a way that all students have to express themselves in distance education.»

The students learn to communicate better about both professional and more personal issues than students at college, they say.

There is one reservation in the interviews against saying that students' capabilities of communication are due to the study model. Perhaps the students' maturity is the reason I will return to this issue in the next part.

Distance students' maturity and motivation

In the questions about the distance students' responsibility, reflection and problem-solving skill and communication ability, teachers say that they seem to reflect more than campus students, are more responsible in the study situation and that they communicate better. The explanation might be, they say, that the students are more mature and more motivated than campus students. They have their practice and study qualifications, but because of geography and family situation, they have not been able to follow an ordinary study programme.

One teacher says:

«---they are unbelievably mature and prepared for the study. They have really been responsible in discussions. When we meet them at campus, we register that they have been in groups and have discussed. They have reflections about professional and theoretical questions.»

Another teacher says that there is a problem with this research work I am doing. The student group represent another population than students at campus.

This reservation is relevant if the main aim is to compare the two groups' study work. Then the populations have to be comparable.
Most of the questions in this research were formulated so as to show the possibility to develop responsibility, reflection and communication skill in the study model, not to compare the students' study performances. It is, however, natural for the teachers to compare the student groups.

Even if there are certain comparisons, the answers show that distance students have a study form that gives them responsibility, varying assignments that make them reflect before they give answers, and different communication means which they have to understand and use. These are the possibilities that may develop aspects of the students' professional qualifications. Perhaps the beforehand motivation makes them do things better. It is, however, also difficult to say which way motivation goes, from the student to the study or the other way round. Obviously, the study has not dampered motivation.

Professionalism as a whole

Distance students' practice is the same as in campus courses, and the evaluation of practice, done by the practice teacher is important. In Norway, the law says, however, that the institution must evaluate students' professionalism in particular. Therefore it is an obligation for all teachers who meet the students.

The answers are, with some small variations, positive in relation to the questions about how different sides of the students' qualifications to the profession are catered for in the distance study. In some cases, both the possibilities and the results in these questions are reported to be even better than in campus study.

One would then expect a clear yes to the last question to the teachers:

« Are you able to evaluate the students' professionalism and their fitness for the profession in the same way that you do with campus students?»

Some teachers say yes without hesitation, for example:

«I don't think it's more difficult», « I haven't felt that as a problem. I think things go quite well.»
or
«Yes I can, but I don't have as many lectures as in the campus course.»

Some have far more reservations. They say, for example:

«Perhaps not in the same way», «I think it is more difficult; it is easier when you have students here at college daily», or *«I see them only in a situation when I lecture»*.

Some teachers express their insecurity directly. Some place the responsibility on the practice teacher. That means diminishing their own responsibility.

I interpret the responses to the last question as revealing more insecurity about evaluating professionalism than developing the same professionalism as a special qualification, even if it is a responsibility for every teacher.

This is an interesting result. If I should try to give an explanation, I could use my own long experience in education and say that some of the causes may be that the evaluation of professionalism both in campus and distance studies contain evaluations of some personal qualifications. The nearer you get to students' private spheres, the more difficult and touchy it seems. The other explanation may be that the differences between the practice teachers' evaluation and the «campus» teachers' evaluation are not defined, and the components in the evaluation are not described clearly in the framework plan.

Summary

To be able to say if it is possible to evaluate the students' professionalism even if there is some insecurity among the teachers, we can have a look at the work from December 1997 elaborated by a departmental group. The work came after the interviews. This work is the group's counsel to the Norwegian Ministry of Education in their obligations to bring forth an evaluation of professionalism. The Ministry still hesitates to send out its decisions.

The issues for evaluation proposed by the group are:

1. *The student shows interest, ability and the will to learn the necessary knowledge and secure practical skills in subjects of theoretical, aesthetic and of a practical kind.*
2. *The student shows ability and the will to plan, manage and evaluate educational work for children, young people or adults in accordance with rules for the education.*
3. *The student shows ability and the will to develop a conscious and reflective attitude both regarding the responsibility of the teacher's role, and her or his own and other's practice, being loyal to common values which society wants to develop further on, through laws and framework plans.*
4. *The student shows ability and the will to recognise what is happening in a group, and creates appropriate situations for care and learning for children, young people and adults.*
5. *The student shows ability and the will to communicate and co-operate with children and young people, teachers, co-students, parents and responsible persons and other grown-ups in the school society/day care institution in a way that shows respect and care for others.*
6. *The student shows ability and the will to evaluate her or his work, and receive and act upon the consequences of counselling in an open and reflective way.*

Apart from the issues which directly refer to the practice situation, for example issue 2 and 4, we see that the earlier discussed areas of knowledge, skills, attitudes and responsibility, reflection and communication are all mentioned. When the study model gives the opportunity to develop and take care of these qualifications, and the teachers in reality have evaluated the students' follow-up in these areas, then the

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model, in my opinion, also secures professional development and the chance to evaluate the students' fitness for teaching.

General comments

Perhaps I have to repeat that the model consists of both direct and distance teaching. It is necessary for the teacher in distance education to plan thoroughly. It is necessary to evaluate which part of the discipline or subject he or she has to present in which way, to know which function computer conferences are meant to have, as well as study letters or telephone conferences. The use of fantasy and some experimentation is important. Students also have to see the programme as a whole, and their responsibility in it.

It is an achievable goal to secure the development of professionalism in distance study. It is not evident to which extent good results are due to students' motivation, maturity and experience from kindergarten work, or to the organisation of the study. Perhaps things go both ways. Many teachers said that they were sceptical towards the model beforehand, but, during the course, they had learnt a lot about their own teaching, and they were convinced that a distance course had perhaps more things going for it than a campus one.

Martha Lea